THE LATE ALDEN MARCH, M. D.

A PAPER READ AT A MEETING OF THE
ELMIRA ACADEMY OF MEDICINE,
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BY
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In memory of my revered and honored teacher, under whose guidance for more than three years I pursued the study of my profession, I propose to devote the time allotted me this evening,* in reviewing his professional and individual character, which for so great a number of years made him a marked and conspicuous man in the councils of our art in the state and nation.

Alden March was born in Sutton, Worcester County, Mass., in 1795. His father, a humble farmer, followed his calling under the adverse and necessitous circumstances which attend the care of a large family. Agriculture, as practised at that day, in an obscure and rough portion of Massachusetts, was simply the act of wresting from the soil, by the most vigorous manual labor, unaided by the helps of inventive

* At the previous meeting in July, Dr. Wey was appointed by the President of the Academy, to read an essay.

genius, the scanty products which were required for the immediate and pressing wants of the farmer's family. To cultivate a small farm was merely to subsist upon "the fruits thereof," and this, too, in the primitive and economical manner common among the New Englanders of the past century. Such had been the boyhood of Webster, of Cass and a host of equally distinguished Americans; and I may add that a special charm attaches to a like origin, which is subsequently enobled by a life of exalted position and usefulness.

From his earliest years accustomed to toil and labor, Dr. March followed the plough and performed all the drudgery incident to the position in which he was born. An early life more uneventful than his can scarcely be imagined. The stock to which he belonged, however, possessed no fellowship with ignorance, and he was allowed the advantages of the school of the neighborhood, especially during the winter months, when he could be most easily spared from the labors of the farm. The amount of knowledge thus acquired was doubtless the chief inheritance which the Doctor derived from his father, whose slender resources prevented a more generous bestowal of fortune. The result showed that it proved, in the hands of the son, a possession of greater significance and worth, than estates, honors and titles. Limited as his advantages proved, they were doubtless eagerly appreciated and zealously prosecuted, and it did not require a long period to exhaust them. Education as then prescribed in the common country schools, embraced reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and perhaps grammar.

Beyond this the pupil could not go, for the reason that the teacher could not lead, even if the former had been disposed to follow. Books were scarce, time was limited,the necessities of the country did not demand a high order of intellectual progress, and the circumstances of the people did not warrant it.

An elder brother had many years before become a physician, and practiced his profession in his native state.

Thus the early years of the subject of this notice were passed, in severe labor, in study and in such general reading as chanced to fall in his way. As he approached manhood he taught school in many country towns. At the same sime he began and continued his medical studies, under the direction of his brother.— The force and energy of his character proved of early development; and the many hindrances which interposed to check his progress, only served to renew and multiply his vigor and resources, as one after another he overcame them all,and strode manfully on towards the accomplishment of his earnest hopes and anticipations. He had set out with the determination to master a profession, and never, for an instant, did the consciousness of his inherent strength and ability to succeed,desert him. He attended lectures in Boston, and from a remark which fell from his lips in conversation, during the session of the American Medical Association in that city in 1865, he doubtless rendered such service to the professor of Anatomy, in procuring subjects for dissection, as in part, if not fully, to de-

fray the expenses of his lecture course. His success in that dangerous field of service, indicated the fearlessness of his character, and the earnestness, amounting to enthusiasm, with which he sought to accomplish the objects of his ambition. And it must be acknowledged, in surveying the life of Dr. March, that he was guided and governed, from the very beginning of his medical pupilage, by an honest and laudable ambition. Ambition furnished an incentive to study, to investigate, to explore, to originate, to strike out in new and untrodden fields, and relying entirely upon his conscious strength and knowledge, first as an innovator, contemptuously considered, next as an instructor, with scanty patronage and support, next as a general surgeon, incurring the hostility of the profession, and finally as a masterly teacher, a brilliant and successful operator, a bold, independent and fearless man, he won the confidence and patronage, not only of his colleagues, but of an immense representation of people, which continued, with increased manifestation, to the very day of his death.

Dr. March's final course of lectures, which resulted in the degree of Doctor of Medicine, was attended at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, which at this time embraced a Medical Department.

He commenced practice in Albany, in 1820. Here we first notice him as an *innovator*. He brought the zeal and industry of his student life to bear upon his first years of practice, and immediately, upon opening an office, began the study and teaching of anatomy, with dissections and lectures upon the human subject.

A small number of patrons gave him encouragement composed of students of medicine and a few bold as well as curious men of his acquaintance. The profession, regarding him as an adventurer, refused even to recognize, much less to encourage him. His utter failure and discomfiture was predicted, and his removal from the city was anticipated at an early day. So fierce became the opposition to Dr. MARCH, and so successful, under the bond of combination, that the prediction of his opponents seemed about to be realized, and because of the threatened failure of his scheme to teach practical anatomy, and his equally signal failure to secure patronage among the citizens, in a moment of chagrin and disappointment, he intimated to the gentleman from whom he leased his office, the noble-minded Mr. EVARTS, a highly successful merchant of Albany, that it was his purpose to take up his residence in the neighboring town of Schenectady. With an insight respecting character which long experience in business had imparted, Mr. EVARTS fully appreciated the sterling worth of his tenant, and strove to dissuade him from his intention. The Doctor was in arrears for rent and without present or prospective means to discharge his obligations to his landlord. The latter delicately suggested that the Doctor should not, in a moment of depression, yield to the adverse tide against which he was struggling, but with renewed strength, contend with and overcome the opposition which met him at every turn. If Mr. EVARTS did not release the Doctor from indebtedness for rent, he made the terms of payment so easy that the obligation rested lightly upon the young surgeon, who concluded to abide

the course of events in giving him patronage, support and position in the substantial and conservative city of Albany.

This event, simple as it appears, was doubtless the turning point in the history and career of Dr. MARCH. A few words of encouragement, sealed by a noble and generous act, on the part of a citizen of character and influence, whose sympathies were drawn out towards a deserving young man, proved the means of changing the destiny of his life. He gradually grew in favor with the people, overcame the opposition of the profession, and at last rose to be regarded as a surgeon of skill and character. This position was not achieved through favor or compromise. Dr. MARCH won his reputation, first at home among his early opponents, and afterwards more extensively through the state and nation, simply by his great merit as a surgeon. The anatomical foundation upon which he built during all his early pupilage and wearisome and discouraging waiting in Albany, served as a fitting base to sustain the monument which rose to such majestic proportions, as the full measure of his professional fame was achieved.

At the time Dr. MARCH began to teach anatomy in Albany, that city numbered only 15,000 souls. Anatomical study, with the human subject in process of dissection before the pupil, was not regarded as essential by the profession. Such knowledge was obtained by means of books, plates, dried preparations and didactic teaching. If the profession looked with little fa-

vor upon practical anatomy, it could not be expected that the people would view it with greater charity.

The profession in Albany opposed the schemes and plans of Dr. MARCH, both as a teacher and practitioner, because, in the first place, his manner of teaching was greatly in advance of the age in which he lived, and next, because in the field of surgery, which he proceeded to cultivate, they witnessed the breaking down of the old and time-honored barriers of conservatism, by which the practice of that branch of our art had been surrounded. With disregard of opposition based upon such insufficient reasons, he steadily pursued his course, conscientiously depending upon the integrity of his purpose and the truth and justice of his claims of recognition, and confidently looking for success. And success came, after a comparatively brief period of "looking for the day." In 1825 Dr. MARCH was appointed professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the Vermont Academy of Medicine, at Castleton. This position he held with great reputation, for ten years, during which time he maintained a private lecture course in Albany, and engaged in general practice.

But the purpose for which he entered the profession, and for which he was continually striving, now began to be manifested. In 1830, after a residence of ten years in Albany, Dr. MARCH delivered a public lecture in that city on the "Propriety of establishing a Medical College and Hospital" there. The lecture was given to the press, and produced a decided sensation among all classes of people. This was the be-

ginning of an attempt to organize a Medical College in Albany.

A residence of ten years among a people slow, proverbially slow,to appreciate merit, but generous and ready to acknowledge it, when impressed by conviction, had resulted, as might be expected, in attaching to Dr. MARCH a number of earnest and devoted friends, who warmly espoused the cause which lay nearest his heart, and entered zealously upon the undertaking to found a Medical College in that city. The Legislature was petitioned for an act of iucorporation, but fierce opposition sprang up, prompted by the profession of the city of Albany and the combined efforts of the medical schools in the state. The Fairfield Medical College, then in the full tide of success, with a distinguished faculty, entered with great power and effect in the contest to prevent the organization of a rival school.

It would be uninteresting to this audience to narrate the history of this exciting period of Dr. MARCH's life. For eight years he maintained a struggle with all the Medical Colleges of the State of New York, which through rich and powerful agencies, sought to thwart his plans. Almost single-handed, he fought the old and favored corporations of the Medical Department of the University of the State of New York, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Medical College at Fairfield and the Geneva Medical College. The same spirit of invincible courage and determination which he exhibited in early battling with opposition,was shown in this later struggle. But he was no longer an unknown man contending with men and

organizations of weight and influence in community.

And by reason of indomitable will and perseverance, he finally achieved success, and on the 3d of January, 1839, after perfecting all necessary arrangements, the first course of lectures in the Albany Medical College was commenced, with a class of fifty-seven students. Dr. March filled the chair of Surgery, Dr. James H. Armsby of Anatomy and Physiology, Amos Dean, Esq., of Medical Jurisprudence, Dr. Ebenezer Emmons of Chemistry and Pharmacy, Dr. Henry Greene of Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children, Dr. David M. McLachlan of Materia Medica, and Dr. David Meredith Reese of the Theory and Practice of Medicine.

It was only after the first course of lectures commenced, that the charter of the College was procured from the Legislature. When the citizens of Albany became fully aroused to the desirability and prospective advantage of having such an institution in operation among them, they applied with such heartiness and effect to the Legislature, that the necessary powers were quickly conferred, and the Albany Medical College took its place upon a par with the old and favored medical schools of the state and country.

I cannot refrain from speaking in this connection, of the signal service rendered the Albany Medical College in the senate of the state, by the representative from this district, the Hon. John G. McDowell, whose sympathies were all aroused for the intrepid and invincible March, whose efforts to cope with such rival powers as I have mentioned, won the admiration of the

large-hearted and magnamimous Senator, and made Dr. MARCH his friend for life.

Soon after I located in Elmira I was presented to Judge McDOWELL, who immediately enquired where I had received my medical education. When I replied in the office of Dr. MARCH and at the Albany Medical College, the Judge warmly grasped me by the hand, and heartily wished me success. An entertaining conversation then followed, respecting the exciting scenes which were enacted in the Senate Chamber during the time when Dr. MARCH was engaged in urging upon that body the propriety of adopting the measures which he so earnestly and persistently presented from session to session.

With the opening of the Medical College, Dr. MARCH inaugurated a novel proceeding in the history of such institutions, which soon became popular and was adopted very generally in the medical schools of the country. It was his custom, every Saturday morning throughout the lecture term, to present to the pupils in attendance, a large,varied and interesting group of cases, chiefly surgical, upon which he would deliver short addresses, and perform such operations as might be indicated. In this way, in lieu of hospital practice, an immense amount of surgery was brought before the students, comprising the minor as well as the capital and rare and original operations, which made his name so familiar in the history of surgery. This custom was continued from the first Saturday in January 1839, to the last Saturday during the lecture term of the present year. The amount of surgery displayed to students by means of this uninterrupted

exhibition, was immense, numbering many thousands of cases. Some of the most daring and successful of Dr. MARCH'S operations were performed in this manner. The removal of enormous tumors by tedious dissection among congested tissues, requiring the frequent ligation of vessels, the amputation of limbs, lithotomy, staphyloraphy, plastic operations, the most delicate ophthalmological manipulations, these were among the wonders of his cunning hand, and the results of his educated diagnostic experience.

It should be understood that the surgical service performed by Dr. MARCH at the Saturday college clinics, by which so many men, women and children were relieved of deformities, infirmities and multiform varieties of suffering, was entirely gratuitous. The summing up of this charitable record would reveal a history of good deeds done to the afflicted, which I am convinced has no parallel in the surgical history of our country.

The success of the Albany Medical College is well known. Its standard of education has always been high. The aim of its teachers has not been to multiply physicians, but to thoroughly qualify them. And as it has never lacked for support and patronage, it has been able to maintain a dignified position and character among schools of distinguished reputation in the country.

Soon after the alteration and occupation of the building known as the Albany Medical College, which had been used as a Lancaster school, and when its prosperity became an assured success, the medical col-

lege at Fairfield was abandoned, and Drs. T. Romeyn Beck, Lewis C. Beck and James McNaughton of that institution, accepted chairs in the new organization. The brothers Beck died while teaching in their respective departments of Materia Medica and Chemistry, and Professor James McNaughton, the oldest medical teacher in uninterrupted devotion to his duties in the United States, extending through a period of fifty years, venerable with age and full of honor, still lectures on the Theory and Practice of Medicine,

Upon the opening of the Albany Medical College, Dr. March had reached his forty-fourth year. He was in the very perfection of mental and physical vigor. He had long since overcome the opposition which assailed him at the outset of his career, and enjoyed an extensive and lucrative practice, almost exclusively in the field of surgery. His reputation had spread over the land, and physicians in every portion of it, as well as intelligent laymen, knew him by his achievements. His labors were overwhelming, and even from boyhood, he never seemed to think, except when reminded by positive sickness, that a limit could be placed upon his mental and physical application.

The honor that was conferred upon Dr. March by electing him President of the Medical Society of the State of New York, and subsequently of the American Medical Association, you all know. Williams College honored itself no less than the recipient of its degree, by bestowing upon him the title of Doctor of Laws.

The life of Dr. March, from the foundation of

the Albany Medical College, we are all familiar with. He was so intimately identified with the profession, that it seems almost impossible to separate him from its interests. And yet in private life, when he laid aside professional cares and anxieties, and sought to restore his over-worked energies in social pleasures, in the pursuits of agriculture, or in traveling, he was the same animated, intelligent and delightful companion. Amid all the absorbing responsibilities of a large practice, it was his habit, frequently, to devote an afternoon to the labors of his farm, a few miles from the city. In this connection the word *labor* is properly applied. During the few hours on these occasions, which he devoted to what he termed *relaxation*, he accomplished with the pruning knife, the hoe, the scythe, and other implements, as much manual labor as would have satisfied a laboring man that he was doing a full day's work. He would return to his home from these frequent "forays," as they might have been termed, stained, soiled and wet with perspiration, and at the same time rested and refreshed. Dr. MARCH possessed the quality in a remarkable degree, of being able, in the work which he had in hand, to banish all other considerations from his mind. A surgical operation entirely engrossed his mental as well physical being. And all the time spent on his farm, by a process of revolution of thought and interest, which allowed a period of mental rest, equally engrossed his attention.

But I must hasten on to allude to one of the chief points of interest in the life of Dr. MARCH. Aside from his wonderful success as an operative surgeon,

my first allusion will be to the results of his investigation of hip-disease. From the earliest teaching of surgery, down to within a period of twenty-five years, authors and lecturers alike, regarded the final stage of this affection as the result of dislocation of the head of the femur. You will all bring to mind illustrations of this condition, in which marked indications of dislocation exist, such a shortening of the leg, inversion of the toe, trochanteric prominence, &c. Numerous as were the wet and dry specimens of hip-disease in the medical museums of the country, and much as the subject had been investigated by surgeons, no fact seemed better established than this, that dislocation of the head of the femur was the natural result of the disorganizing process known as hip-disease, *after reaching a certain stage*. In other words, hip-disease, allowed to proceed from one stage to another, from inflammation of the articular extremity of the head of the femur and socket, to final ulceration, always terminated, if recovery took place, in luxation of the bone, either partial, on the margin of the acetabulum, or complete, on the dorsum of the ilium. For years Dr. March believed this doctrine. But as familiarity with the disease increased, and as morbid specimens multiplied in his possession, and he was led to scrutinize them closely, he began to have misgivings of the correctness of this principle. His attention was more particularly drawn to the subject by the interesting nature of the investigation, and the limited opportunities which our country afforded for studying morbid specimens of hip-disease. He visited many collections, public and private, of any consequence, in

the United States, and took copious notes of all important features of the affection, with due regard to their classification and arrangement. Not satisfied with this survey, he went abroad for the second time, if not for the only purpose, at least for the chief purpose of studying the disease in the museums and cabinets of Great Britian and on the continent. Before leaving this country, he had collected, mostly from dissections, the largest number of specimens known to belong to an individual or to an institution in the United States. Indeed, he failed to find in Europe, in a single collection, as many interesting cases of the disease as he possessed. And his going abroad proved the means of adding several specimens to his own collection, which at this time was the most complete, doubtless, in the world.

The result of all this study and investigation established the fact, now universally acknowledged,that dislocation of the femur in hip-disease, though possible under certain circumstances, is the rarest event in the production of morbid changes.

It was satisfactorily shown that the phenonmena of the disease ascribed to dislocation, were merely results of a process of inflammation, terminating in wasting and absorption, which closely resembled that accident.

This explanation, when once made and demonstrated, appears simple enough, and we wonder it was not offered a long time ago. The profession accepted it cautiously, and after many doubts and misgivings, expressed by teachers in the medical schools, by authors, by writers in the journals, as well as by in-

dividual practitioners, Dr. MARCH'S conclusions were adopted as the true condition of hip-disease, in every part of the enlightened world. The connection of Dr. MARCH with this subject, if he had achieved no other distinction, is enough to stamp him as a bold, original and accurate investigator of disease.

I will briefly allude to a few prominent traits in the character of Dr. MARCH, which stood forth in his common, every-day life.

He always sympathized with and cheerfully aided young as well as older physicians, if they *deserved* sympathy and aid. His office was a general gathering place for physicians, accompanied by patients, who desired his opinions and advice. And he always gave such cases full and minute investigation. His method of examining a case, while it may have lacked the system which embraces one region of the body after another, in a prescribed order, was nevertheless thorough, and rarely failed to elicit the prominent features of the disease or affection under consideration. Narrowing down the indications within certain limits, by a process of exclusion, he arrived at the truth, and seldom erred in surgical diagnosis. He was not infallible in judgment, as I might prove by several instances of error and faulty opinion. It was marvellous to witness the almost intuitive perception of sense, which seemed to dwell in the ends of his fingers, when they were employed in searching for deep seated matter. And he seldom failed to reveal the evidence of pus, by a free incision, when he had thus committ- himself to an opinion.

As a lecturer on surgery, Dr. MARCH was eminent-

ly plain and practical. His course during a lecture term was carefully marked out and arranged under heads and subjects. The skeleton or frame-work of this plan was filled up from day to day by illustrations of cases from his immense stores of experience, and by morbid specimens from the shelves of the college museum, where, during all the busy years of his life, they had been rapidly accumulating. This method, while it gave to the lectures the interest of extemporaneous delivery, took away from them the dryness and wearisomeness of a formal presentation of hackneyed topics. That the Doctor's lectures were never tedious, was shown by the large number of students and physicians who always attended them. The latter class, from a young alumnus of the college to an old graduate under Dr. March as teacher of anatomy in Vermont, as well as physicians drawn thither by his reputation for surgical skill, paid him the most marked respect and honor.

His convictions of surgical truth and practice were so strong and abiding, and his desire of impressing them upon students so sincere and conscientious, that he thus acquired great power over his hearers. He never was diverted into fields of speculation or specious reasoning. His mind discarded the *reasoning element*, as rigidly interpreted. I doubt if he comprehended the reach and extent of this principle or faculty of the mind, at least, he never attempted to exercise it. This I do not mention in disparagement of the great surgeon; it never seemed to be a deficiency in his own estimation or in the opinion of his friends and admirers. Perhaps his early training, by partaking of the practical, in its fullest and plainest sense,

and proceeding on towards adult life in the same toilsome direction, gave him a relish or desire for the exhaustive or demonstrative study of anatomy, upon which he based the whole field of operative surgery.

This suggestion furnishes the key to Dr. March's success as an operator, as well as his readiness as a lecturer. No matter what portion of the wide domain of surgery enlisted his attention, whether the consideration of fractures, wounds of arteries, searching the bladder for a stone, or determining the nature of an obscure affection of the ear, the anatomical construction and relation of parts seemed as familiar in his mind as if he had just given the subject special investigation and study. He rarely consulted works on anatomy. The whole scheme or plan of the body, even to its nicer and more delicate details, was faithfully mirrored in his mind.

In reciting anatomical peculiarities, his nomenclature revealed the system of a former period, while at the same time it embraced the whole subject.

It is not difficult to describe Dr. March's surgical operations. They were maturely considered, if they were at all important, and carefully studied. Authors, from the older recognized standards, including the famous John and Sir Charles Bell, down to the latest writers of treatises and monographs, were consulted. This ground was patiently gone over, usually at night, after a day of labor, and the entire subject was elaborated in his mind, and a plan of proceeding instituted. This result reached, he lost no time in moving on the operation. And here his genius was fully shown. Every contingency was provided for, every want of the case anticipated. Assistants were

duly assigned their duty, and the work proceeded. A single feeling actuated the surgeon, and that was the completion of the operation in as short a time as was compatible with safety. One step followed another, the knife at this moment, a finger at the next proving the guide, until the tumor or diseased limb was removed, the strangulated bowel replaced, or a nicely fitting plastic operation concluded.

It was a favorite maxim with Dr. March, always to use the finger instead of the knife, as long as it could be made available to accomplish the purpose in view.

Dr. March ever stood ready to defend the profession against the corrupt machinations of unprincipled lawyers, who through suits of malpractice, hope and expect,while they obtain damages for their clients, to abundantly reward themselves. Having passed through the ordeal of a malpractice prosecution, which resulted in his acquittal, and having on another occasion successfully vindicated himself in a charge of defamation of character, made by a notorious empiric, whose paste or plaster the Doctor openly asserted had caused the death of a woman to whose breast it had been applied,he was warmly alive to the propriety as well as necessity of defending his professional brethern, when similarly assailed. He was extensively sought as a witness by physicians who were compelled to answer the hateful charge of malpractice, and I should be lacking in gratitude, if I did not revert to the signal service which he rendered Dr. Squire, our late President, and the writer, in vindication of the mode and manner of an operation for extraction of a loose car-

tilage from the knee-joint, which led to a suit for damages in 1861.

Dr. March was a kind and humane man. Aside from the river of charity which regularly, Saturday after Saturday, during the lecture term at the Medical College, flowed through the operating theatre of that institution, he gave in the every-day discharge of professional duties and in liberal gifts of money, to the poor and afflicted. As God had prospered him in bestowing fame and riches upon him, he regarded himself as a steward in His hand, to dispense the blessings of his art and science, as well as his wealth, to the suffering and needy.

But the crowning merit of Dr. March's life and character consisted in his humble, christian walk and conversation. Many years ago, in the height of professional activity and achievements, under a deep sense of conviction, he stepped forth upon the path of christian life, which, during all his subsequent career, he trustingly and faithfully followed.

Thus from the humblest beginning, through poverty, adversity, opposition and reproach, we see how constant was the rise and prosperity of the subject of this notice; how reward came as the sure result of incessant application and devotion to the chief purpose of life; how fame, honor and wealth were heaped upon him, and how, with elevation in the esteem of the world, he humbled himself as a christian, and devoted all his powers to the advancement of his profession, and the bestowal of priceless gifts of charity to the sick and afflicted, through a long and eventful life.

May his example ever abide with us, and incite us to greater efforts for our fellow-men.